

# The Mystery of the Kailash Trail



## Chapter 9 **Guardians of *Kang Renpoche***

Bharat Bhushan

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### About the book

The oldest mystery known to the Oriental World. It is said that nobody dares to venture out to walk on the Kailash Mountain. And it is also said that those who walked up the mountain, never returned. In all these centuries, they have gone within, never to return.

### About the author

#### **Bharat Bhushan**

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books, inside the internet, and deep within the mind.



## **Book 2: Chapter 9: Part 1: Loga of the Klaču, senior monk at Chiu Gumpa**

It had been an entire since they had met the senior monk at the Chiu Gumpa. Vijay Kulkarni had decided to stay back at the monastery. Himanshu and Paramita had gone ahead with the tourist group. The senior monk had spoken with the tour guide leader and requested him to allow Vijay Kulkarni to stay at the Chiu Gumpa. The tour guide had been worried and wondered about the excuse that he would have to give at Nyalam when he would return with the other pilgrims. It would be five days yet, for anyone to notice that Vijay had gone missing from the group.

Vijay was very happy to have stayed back at the Chiu Gumpa. It was not usual for non-Tibetan and non-Buddhist or Bon to stay overnight at the Chiu Gumpa, unless there was a storm or an unexpected situation. Tibetan pilgrims seemed to be staying back, in their entire aspect of eternal timelessness. Their pilgrimage around Manasarovar or Mount Kailash seemed to be without any time-bound deadlines. They traveled with meagre resources and did not have any support system. They depended entirely on the local monasteries and would just walk in, knowing that they would not be turned away. They made themselves at home, helping, cleaning and cooking at the Chiu Gumpa, and one of them brought a bowl of moderately pungent noodle soup.

One of the windows at the Chiu Gumpa's main prayer hall overlooked a spectacular panorama of the

Manasarovar and the mountains that could be seen beyond the great lake. He could see the tremendously awe-inspiring landscape. The distant mountains across the waters of the Manasarovar seemed to be just standing there, suspended in the clouds. The senior monk came up to stand alongside Vijay and looked out of the window. He kept watching silently, soaking in the nippy air that came from the great lake.

“I am known by several titles in the sacred order, but knowing that you are from India, from a land that I love so dearly, you may call me as Loga of the Kla-Chu, for that is how I was known.” The senior monk said, “My native village is a very small and remote one, deep in the valleys where several Himalayan streams come together to flow into the Indus. The Kla-Chu is also one of them, and our village moves about, depending on the availability of good grazing lands above and below. It was beautiful land and the people are extremely innocent and trusting. My parents decided that I should go away from the valley and make my future.”

Vijay smiled and thanked the senior monk, and said, “I am Vijay Kulkarni, from Pune in India. I am from Maharashtra. I have traveled over many regions in the Himalayas, but I am yet to go to the source of the Indus. The actual source is supposed to be unknown, but the many mountain streams that come in to give the great river its strength are spread over a great area. Is the Kla-Chu somewhere in the upper reaches before the Indus gains in its strength or is it after it reaches some of the upper plains? Are there any monasteries in that region?”

The senior monk replied, “I heard that someone had gone up into the inner valleys, some of the most

unknown and secret ones, and he had gone up there with our monks. The exact details are not known as yet, but they came out and said that they had been to the actual source of the great river. They had gone up from Banggokong, and they had walked through several springs of Himalayan streams. Do you know that if you want to walk in search of the actual source, as we think it should be at, among all our local villages, we would have to go somewhere close to the northern reaches of the Mount Kailash kora, probably somewhere north of Dirapuk.”

“North of Dirapuk!” exclaimed Vijay. He was thinking it out, scanning the maps in his memory and his knowledge of the region from the many travelogues and books that he had studied in his explorations into the Mount Kailash region. He said, “There are none. There are no valleys that lead out of Dirapuk to the north. There is one, but it does not go anywhere. There cannot be any continuity outside the kora. If there were, then the great rivers of the world would not have existed at all. They would have flowed into the valley of the sacred mountain and would have submerged the great lake of Manasarovar. There would have been no Chiu Gompa or Choku Gompa. The valley of the kora is a natural drainage. Is it not?”

The senior monk of Chiu Gompa nodded, “Yes. Come, let me show you an artists’ illustration of what he saw once, in the harsh winter, when he had to stay back at the Chiu Gompa. This must have been painted nearly 150 years ago or 100 years at least. We do not know for sure.” He gestured for Vijay to accompany him to one of the paintings that were on the wall near the window. It was an illustrative representation of the Kailash kora as

it was nowadays, almost. The senior monk pointed out to a darkish line, broken at places, drawn on the valley slopes, and said, “See that line. I feel that must have been a drainage mark for the winter ice that would melt and flood the valley. Nobody would have seen the flooding of the kora, unless someone stayed back or was trapped in the valley.”

“You are all lucky,” said Vijay, “the upper slopes are smooth and have been removed of their boulders and stones. There are no major landslides in the valley of the kora during monsoon or winter. There are no glaciers threatening the valley. But, if you look at the great lake of Manasarovar, the Rakshas Lake and the valley in-between these two big water bodies, you can guess at the landslides that must have occurred. Those big boulders have come here and settled. Some are as big and tall as the Chiu Gompa itself.”

“We are not so lucky at my village, for the monsoon and winter is part of our lives. Our families and their settlements move to the lower plains in the monsoon and winter. What are the lower plains, do you know?” the senior monk asked, and continued, “The lower plains are much higher than Ladakh or your Uttarakhand. For us, it is as far as we can escape. That’s all. My grandfather who had gone in search of the source of the great river had said that old stories spoke about the place as ‘the lion that roared and allowed the river to flow from its mouth’. It must have been due to the great sound that the mountain streams create when they flow through the deep valleys.”

Vijay was trying to picture the flooding of the valley of the kora in the winter, and he did not wish to look




impolite to the senior monk who was explaining about the valleys of his village and the mountain streams in those locations. He was wondering if the two different perspectives would converge and there was something significant in this discussion with the senior monk. He spoke to the senior monk, “If it was to be ‘the lion that roared’, I think it would be very specific to a single location. There has to be an absolutely single location from where the most logical source of the great river would emerge. But, I agree with you, that there must have been untimely flooding of the valley of the kora, perhaps once in fifty or hundred years.”

“Yes. My grandfather said that he had indeed been to such a place.” the senior monk replied, “He had gone with some of the elders from our village and escorted the monks from the Gompa nearby. They spoke about it for some years later, and the monks made a record of the place that they had seen. The parchments and the map and sketches have been kept as a secret for fear that people from other lands or people from ours who would not respect the sacred aspect would go in and destroy the place. The great river is born from our lands, as are the other great rivers from all around the sacred valleys of the Mount Kailash, as you call it. We have many names and we have names for all the various valleys and springs.”

Vijay was intrigued. This conversation was being spoken in a very deliberate manner, he thought. The senior monk did not seem to be as dispassionate or as confusing as he thought him to be. He just had a different manner of explaining a point. Vijay asked, “Are those parchments, maps and sketches kept in your village or in the nearby Gompa? Who would take care of them? Have

you seen them? Do those sketches show the Mount Kailash in the region of the source of the great Indus River? Have you gone to explore those secret valleys?"

The senior monk, Loga of the Kla-Chu as he wanted to be called, replied, "No, my friend, Vijay, I was not able to walk to the Lion and have not seen the mouth of the Lion. All those parchments, maps and sketches were kept carefully by the monks from the local Gompa. When they knew that I had become a senior monk, they gave the entire set to me for safekeeping. I have those maps, drawn in our style, with the names of those places in our languages. It is in our concept of north or south, not like yours. But, they retain the key to many of the mysteries of this land. Would you like to see these parchments and the maps? You may be interested to, no?"



## **Book 2: Chapter 9: Part 2: Brother Tameng and Norbu are asked to go to Darchen**

The monk from Dirapuk sat quietly, immersed in his prayers, deep into his meditative trance. He did not seem disturbed at all with the developments and their current situation. Norbu sat at a distance, watching the monk in his meditation. He knew about meditation and prayers, but had never tried anything like that himself. His mastiff sat nearby, content and happy to be at peace, without tourists or pilgrims. He did not have to chase after the two yaks if they would amble about away from the tracks. There were no tracks here. The two boys, one was a yak-boy and the other a horse-boy, sat near their animals and were busy preparing some sort of a meal.

They had set up a shelter alongside the mountain amidst some closely fallen boulders. The yaks and horse could be hidden inside the boulders if there would be need. Norbu was uncertain about himself. Was he excited? Or, was he worried that he may have stumbled on to some series of events that would not concern him? His parents, back at Darchen, had sent him alone, because they needed the money that he would bring them. What sort of money would he make on this expedition? Was he being honest with the faith that his parents had placed on him?

The monk from Dirapuk had completed with his prayers and meditation and had been quietly watching Norbu and understanding the lines of concern that were obvious on his face. He did not say anything. These were situations that were brought about by forces that were greater than what one could wish for or wish against. To each, was their fate to fight with or against these forces?

Norbu would learn from such situations. He would be wiser in the future, and would be able to face these situations or other complex ones in his life, in later years.

At that moment, Brother Tameng accompanied by a horse and a horse-boy came out of the concealed passage within the landslide of boulders. The monk from Dirapuk stood up and greeted Brother Tameng warmly. The horse-boy went up to the other two boys and got busy in their work for he was desperately hungry. Norbu helped the three boys with gathering up fodder and firewood. Brother Tameng and the monk from Dirapuk were in some serious discussion. Norbu went up to them with two hot bowls of soup and noodles. The other boys also brought up their bowls nearer and sat around them, expectant to hear what was to happen.

Brother Tameng described the trail that led into the landslide of boulders and explained about the clearing and the darker trail that had been ahead. He explained that he had felt disturbed that there were forces ahead that may not desire to be intruded upon. He had come out of the trail and further explained that he would return to Choku Gompa to seek the advice and guidance of Master Rinchen. He would know about what was to be done. The monk from Dirapuk agreed with Brother Tameng.

The two monks decided that they would return to Dirapuk and onwards to Choku Gompa to meet Master Rinchen. Norbu, his two yaks and mastiff would also accompany them, in case they would send any material or other people to the hidden valley. The monk from Dirapuk instructed the three boys to stay at the opening

to the landslide of boulders. He assured them that he would send supplies, food and warm clothing from Dirapuk. The boys agreed to wait at the spot, for they had set up a comfortable camp and they were used to this manner of life.

The two monks and Norbu walked out of the hidden valley down the sloping path towards the Dirapuk monastery. Norbu was happy that the events had resolved some of his doubts. He would at least be returning to the Choku Gompa, and could easily walk back to Darchen and meet his parents. The monk from Dirapuk noticed Norbu's happiness and smiled and thought, it is true... for one has to merely live in the present, and not worry about events that have passed ahead or those events that are to come.

They came up to the eating house run by Sangye and Yeshe's parents. The monk from Dirapuk took some time in explaining the run of events. Yeshe's parents did not seem to be worried, for they knew that Sangye was the very best in this region, and he could be trusted not to be foolishly heroic. They served a hot meal to the two monks and Norbu and provided some food packets for their onward journey towards the Choku Gompa. Norbu became happier and happier, for as a trail helper to the tourists, he had to depend on leftovers or the food that he would cook for himself. Nobody had ever welcomed him to their places and had never served him hot food.

The monk from Dirapuk separated from them and said that he would go up to his monastery and inform the progress of the expedition to his brother monks and organise to send a support party to the opening of the valley. They would carry food and other necessities to

the yak and horse boys who they had left behind. The support party could travel back and forth. He would join them at Choku Gumpa or at Darchen if they would not have returned early. Happy that the necessary arrangements would be made by the Dirapuk monks, Brother Tameng started on the walk back to Choku Gumpa with Norbu.

They arrived at the Choku Gumpa in good spirit, sheltered in the shadow of the sacred *Kang Renpoche*, the Mount Kailash. Norbu and Brother Tameng silently recited their own prayers of thanks to *Kang Renpoche* and entered the monastery. Master Rinchen was visibly happy to see them and welcomed them. Norbu was made to feel special and one of the brother monks took him to rest at a room after having made arrangements for his two yaks and his mastiff. He was given an open shed that was almost like a lean-to against the walls of the monastery. It was sheltered against the wind, and the yaks could feed upon stored fodder near the shed. Norbu's mastiff however had different ideas, and managed to curl up alongside his master.


Brother Tameng explained in detail about the happenings at Dirapuk and later at the valley. The brother monks and Master Rinchen listened eagerly. Master Rinchen was happy, and said, "At least we know that there is a path. We did not imagine all those events. You have seen the footmarks of the herd of giant wild yak. I am happy. I thought that these were sacred visions being disclosed to us in the valley of *Kang Renpoche*. We do not know what this means, but I can now plan ahead and we can determine the future course of action."

“There is a wise monk at the Chiu Gompa. He had spoken of many mysterious events that he knew about in the valleys to the north of the kora of the *Kang Renpoche*. I have met him on several occasions. I will talk to him on the cell phone.” Master Rinchen said, “He had handed over many drawings and sketches and other rare artifacts to the sacred Gyangdrak Gompa near Darchen. Brother Tameng, do take some rest for a while. Let me talk to the senior monk at Chiu Gompa and we will plan to meet at the Gyangdrak Gompa.”

Brother Tameng went out in search of Norbu and found him in the shed, fast asleep. The mastiff had gotten used to Brother Tameng and therefore did not growl or bark at him. Brother Tameng had a comfortable place to sleep at the monk’s dormitory at the Chiu Gompa, but he wanted to stay humble, for Norbu was a member of his team, and he could not take on comforts, if his team member did not have any. In any case, the shed looked quite comfortable. He spread out his mattress and went off to sleep, covered in a bunch of warm blankets. His brother monks came out to watch this strange comradeship and smiled in understanding.

Master Rinchen had completed his telephone conversation with the senior monk at Chiu Gompa. The senior monk had not been surprised at all. He spoke of someone called Vijay who was staying with him and had seen strange visions and their conversation about the valley of the Lion’s Mouth. This was strange, the senior monk had said. They had been discussing the same valleys. He would come over to Gyangdrak Gompa and they would be able to have a look at the ancient maps, drawings and sketches done by his grandfather.

Norbu and Brother Tameng were woken up and asked to get ready to go to Darchen. Norbu could meet his parents and explain to them about his adventures. Brother Tameng and Master Rinchen would hire a new group of yaks and horses and pick up supplies, including much needed food supplies. They would go ahead to Gyangdrak Gompa from Darchen. They would have to be careful about the policemen at Darchen who may wonder if something suspicious was happening, for the monks of the three monasteries to meet up suddenly. Norbu was truly happy now. He had not thought it possible that he would meet his parents so early. They would be happy to see him.





## Book 2: Chapter 9: Part 3: Hariram Maharaj comes to Darchen

Hariram Maharaj was fascinated with what he had heard from the two pilgrims from the Karakul Lake and the Kongur mountains. He had never known that there were similar mountains, as sacred as the Mount Kailash, and that ancient peoples considered both Kongur and Kailash as continuity. How could that be possible? As a devout Indian, and as devotees from other religions, everyone knew that Mount Kailash, or *Kang Renpoche*, was the final destination in faith. This was the *ashtapada* and this sacred valley of the kora was the most sought after pilgrimages in many religions. But, as the two pilgrims had explained, everyone comes to Mount Kailash and return. Very few come here to stay.

It could certainly be possible, thought Hariram Maharaj. There were villages here that did not move during the winter. There were ancient nomads and herdsmen who lived out in the open pasturelands in the winter. There were mountain hamlets that could secure themselves and be able to live through the winter. Devotees and pilgrims who came in from India, Nepal and other Hindu, Buddhist and Jain lands would most certainly return after their pilgrimage. Tibetan pilgrims, Buddhist or Bon, would also prefer to return, but they did manage to do a leisurely journey and would not be chased away by the police. This was not like Lhasa, he thought.

The two pilgrims had had a profound impact on Hariram Maharaj. He felt that he had been wasting his life, living as a fugitive at Shiquanhe. He had settled in to the landscape, and could speak Tibetan very fluently and he dressed as one. Nobody could make him out unless they

had to speak to him for a longer period of time. He should get started on his goal of completing the 108 *koras* and it could only begin if he were to be closer to Mount Kailash. He would have to bid goodbye to Luo Tsering, at least for the moment, and move ahead to Darchen.

Hariram Maharaj explained his dilemma to Luo Tsering, who heard him out patiently. He had known that this day would come, and he had been ready for it. He was fond of Hariram Maharaj and he did not want this gentle cook and expert of everything there was to be known about India and their strange vegetarians. How could there be people who did not eat meat, was an eternal puzzle to Luo Tsering. He spoke to Hariram Maharaj, “Go if you must, because I know that you dearly want to begin on your goal of completing the 108 *koras*. There is nothing wrong about it. Everyone knows you around here, and you are spoken about even at Darchen. The policemen know you. It is you who think that you are successful at hiding yourself. They know that you are not a criminal or a spy.”

“I am afraid, Brother,” said Hariram Maharaj, “I am afraid of the cold. I can suffer it here at Shiquanhe, because I am inside the eatery and always stand near the hot stove. I also sleep near the stove. But, I am not known at Darchen in the manner of a pilgrim. I will have to stay at Darchen for many years now in order to complete my goal of 108 *koras*. I need to get a job while I am at Darchen. Later, during the harsh winter, I want to travel back to Shiquanhe in the initial years, and be with you. You are my only family here in Tibet.”

Luo Tsering smiled, for he knew that Hariram Maharaj was terrified of the cold and the winter in Tibet. The pull of the sacred *Kang Renpoche* was very strong. HE decides about who will go into HIS shelter, and who will stay away. He said, “O Brother from India, you are a good man. You have a good heart. I know that you are totally shaken up by the stories of the two pilgrims who have come from an ancient land in Tibet, west of Ngari. But, my brother, this is Tibet, and we are in the most ancient lands of Tibet. Who knows what exists out there in the mountains between *Kang Renpoche* and Kongur and the Pamirs? Go if you must. But, you are always welcome here.”

The two pilgrims from the ancient lands had been hearing all this discussion. The elder pilgrim smiled, and said, “You are correct, O Master of this eatery. Who knows how the sacred mountains call you. They are everywhere. These mountains are living beings. They have noble souls within them. Countless numbers of noble people, sages, saints and seers have come to these mountains and have disappeared within them. Today, we are in a nation where law and order is visible. This was not the case, at least, about 3-4 decades ago. Many sages and noble souls have stayed back.”

After having bid a tearful farewell to Luo Tsering and his wife, and the other friends that he had made at Shiquanhe, Hariram Maharaj begged a request ride with one of the pilgrim vehicles that were going back to Darchen after the storm. The drivers knew him and never thought that he was something of an illegal traveler in the Mount Kailash area. They had always seen him at Shiquanhe and never thought him to be an outsider. Luo Tsering had spoken of a family that also

had an eatery at Darchen and supplied equipment, yaks and horses to the pilgrim groups. He had suggested that if Hariram Maharaj were to say that he had come from Luo Tsering, he would be able to get a job as a cook at the Darchen eatery.

Luo Tsering had explained that the family was from a hamlet near Shiquanhe, and their elderly father stayed at their farm. Their daughters took care of their yak herd at Shiquanhe and they were well known in the town and in the villages nearby. The couple that ran the eatery at Darchen had settled in well with the trade of the pilgrims from Europe, India and Nepal. They maintained yaks and horses and had employed a number of boys to take the pilgrims around the *kora*. In fact, Luo Tsering had added, their son, Norbu, was also a yak-boy and he was well known in the *kora*. For all one knew, Norbu must have done the entire *kora* for more than 50 times as part of his job.

Hariram Maharaj arrived at Darchen soon enough and, after enquiry with the locals, found Norbu's parents and their eatery. The couple was very happy to know that someone had come all the way from Shiquanhe, specifically in search of them. They knew Luo Tsering and his eatery, and appreciated the fact that Hariram Maharaj was an exclusive vegetarian cook and that he was proud of his skills. They needed someone like him, and agreed with him that he could work at their eatery and stay inside the place at night, warm, near the stove. That was very practical.

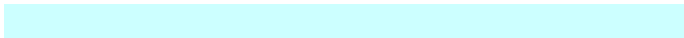
He had asked them about their son, for he was very interested in meeting him. More than 50 *koras*? Wow. That was something. He had yet to start on his 108

*koras*. Norbu's parents had said that he was on the *kora* with a very rich and large pilgrim group. They had hired nearly fifteen yaks and ten horses, and were cooking their own food, Indian vegetarian food, of course, while stopping at each place on the path. They had seen the group earlier in the morning at Darchen and had been told that Norbu had stopped at the Dirapuk monastery and would be returning later with the monks from Dirapuk.

Hariram Maharaj was happy. He was where he wanted to be. From any place at Darchen, if he would turn around, he could see the most sacred *Ashtapada*, the *Kailas Parbat*, or the *Kang Renpoche*. The Darchen eatery was more comfortable than the one at Shiquanhe. This was an actual brick and mortar building, and warmer than Luo Tsering's open shed. There were more pilgrims moving around here, having come from several routes. The local yak boys and the horse boys and the porters seemed to have more money to spend at the eatery.

Norbu's parents had given an empty room, a small one, next to their eatery and had helped him to furnish the place with their extra stove, benches, carpets, wall hangings, utensils and firewood. From morning to noon, the vegetarian eatery had been made ready. A local signboard painter had got it all ready, announcing the "100% all-vegetarian Hindu food" and including mention that one could get "Gujarati Punjabi South Indian Bengali vegetarian Hindu food only". Hariram Maharaj was happy. He had never thought it possible that he would be in demand in the shadow of the sacred *Kang Renpoche*.

The next day, Norbu's parents had exclaimed happily and were pointing towards the *Yamdwar*, Yama's entrance, a place where the pilgrims started on their *kora*. Except, their parents said, that something must be wrong, because their son was returning from Choku Gompa, with two monks, and they were all walking comfortably, with the two yaks and the mastiff following them. Norbu was not following behind the monks as one would normally do, but he was walking along with them and talking to them, actually talking to them, and they were all joking and laughing. Norbu's parents explained to Hariram Maharaj that something must have drastically gone wrong. All these years, Norbu had never returned without having completed the *kora*. But, he was actually returning along the path where nobody would dare return unless dead or seriously unwell.



## **Book 2: Chapter 9: Part 4: Norbu, Brother Tameng and Hariram Maharaj travel together from Darchen to Gyangdrak Gompa**

Norbu and Brother Tameng sat at the newly decorated vegetarian section of the eatery and stretched themselves. Some of the other boys took care of Norbu's two yaks, while his mother fed his mastiff with some fresh meat broth. Norbu's parents sat with Brother Tameng and heard the entire story of the events of the valley over the past three days and nights. Hariram Maharaj stood near the warm stove, cooking a meal for everyone. He was tremendously excited. His first day at Darchen, and it seemed to be filled with aspects of adventure.

Brother Tameng explained about the twelve pilgrims in the stone circle, and the visit by the herd of large wild yaks accompanied by the wolves. He spoke about the meeting at Dirapuk and the expedition to the valley beyond the monastery. Hariram Maharaj was happy, gleefully happy, at all these unexplained happenings. This was what he had come in search of. He was excited to hear about the monks and trackers who had made a team to go into the secret valley. '*Beyul*', they called it. Whatever be the name, imagine a secret valley that was even hidden from the *kora* in the sacred region. This could be the reason why he had managed to reach upto Darchen, he thought.

Norbu kept interrupting, with instances and events that he wanted Brother Tameng to explain. He had been feeling guilty about having left the group of pilgrims that he was supposed to help on their *kora*, and he did

wonder if his father would scold him after the departure of Brother Tameng to the Choku Gompa. To continue with the description of the events, Norbu asked Brother Tameng to explain about the hidden valley and the boulders.

Brother Tameng hesitated. He did not know anything about Hariram Maharaj. This strange looking, almost Tibetan looking, Indian was not supposed to be privileged to know about the Beyul or whatever. If they would get to know about it, who knows, about 10,000 pilgrims could start coming to the valley of *Kang Renpoche*, or Mount Kailash, to visit and wander about the secret valley above Dirapuk. He decided to change the subject, until he knew more about the vegetarian cook who seemed to have been adopted by Norbu's parents.

He spoke about the possibility that the hidden valley could lead them to the '*mouth of the lion*'. This could probably be the source of the Indus River. They certainly knew of the Lungdep Chu, the river from the *Kang Renpoche* valley that flowed into the mighty Indus. The source of the Lungdep Chu River was quite close to Darchen. The only way to reach the source of the Lungdep Chu was to walk for at least two days, if one had a bit of equipment and yaks and horses. Brother Tameng kept talking of the possibility of the Lungdep Chu emerging from the area near Darchen and flowing through the hidden valley of the large wild yaks.

Hariram Maharaj did not understand the geography and the distances between the places at *Kang Renpoche*. But, he loved to hear about all these mysteries. He had once met some Swedes who had come to Shiquanhe with



tremendous amounts of equipment. Some of their stuff had been discarded at Luo Tsering's eatery and Hariram Maharaj had kept the really good thermal stuff for his own use. The leader of the expedition from Sweden had also gifted Hariram Maharaj with snow walking sticks, thermal gloves and balaclavas. He was just about ready to even walk through the inner *kora* to find out how the twelve pilgrims could have disappeared by themselves.

Those Swedes had been mentioning about some search to some place that they kept referring to as the Lion's Valley. Hariram Maharaj had been excited and happy to talk to them, since he came from Gujarat and it was the home of the Lion in India. This secret valley that Brother Tameng was speaking about, it could be the mysterious and unknown 'Lion's Valley', he thought. How could he reach that valley? He had to simply go to this spot and see for himself and travel without any deadlines or return schedules.

Brother Tameng explained to Norbu's parents that the most important concern now was to send food, supplies, equipment, blankets and tenting material to the people who were exploring the valley. Nobody had expected that it would turn out to be a longer expedition, and one could not withdraw or fail in this journey just because there were no supplies. As he explained, what if the expedition took more days and months and was trapped in the secret valley in the winter? It would be better to be prepared and with more than adequate supplies. He suggested that the entire support could be organised by Norbu's parents. They would be paid for the material that they would supply. Master Rinchen had sent some money with him, he assured.

“Would Norbu go back with to the secret valley, Brother?” asked Norbu’s mother, anxiously. Brother Tameng smiled and said that it would not be without him. He had promised Master Rinchen and he would similarly promise Norbu’s parents that the boy would be in his care. It was good to be with Norbu, he told his parents, for he was a good boy and was very intelligent and knew his way around in these mountains. He was good to his yaks and his mastiff trusted him and was very loyal to him. “No,” He said, “Norbu and his two yaks and mastiff would come with me, for I go to the inner kora, to Gyangdrak Gompa. My two brother monks have gone ahead to the sacred place, and they are trying to understand the knowledge available here about the *beyuls*.”

Norbu smiled, for he was also wondering if this was the end of the adventure for him, since he had returned to his parents’ eatery. His only worry had been that his parents would have been frightened for they would have been expecting his return to Darchen with the pilgrims. Now that he had met them and that they knew of his well being, Norbu was eager to get back to the secret valley. He was happy to accompany Brother Tameng for he knew that the monk was entirely unlike the peaceful demeanor that he showed to others.


Norbu’s father went out to collect some animals and boys to be sent to Dirapuk, while Norbu’s mother and Hariram Maharaj busied themselves with placing the necessities to be packed up. All equipment, food and supplies would be covered with thick plastic sheets, and would be covered once again, after they were loaded on to the yaks and horses. Norbu’s father had gathered up four yaks and two horses. Two yak-boys and one horse-

boy would go with them. He had chosen boys who knew the *kora* and animals that he had known to be steadfast in snow or rain. The entire group of animals and boys were soon on their way to the *Yamadwar* and onwards to Choku Gompa before going further to Dirapuk.

Brother Tameng and Norbu got ready to go to Gyangdrak Gompa. Norbu's two yaks were loaded up with supplies for the two, the monk and his new student. Hariram Maharaj had a sudden impulse. He spoke to Norbu's father and sought his permission to go with Brother Tameng and Norbu to Gyangdrak Gompa and later, to the secret valley. He suggested that it would always be better, as they would say in his Gujarat, that three people were always better than two. It would be good to be of help to the expedition, for he could cook and help with the silly tasks. It seemed like a big group was coming together, and who knew how many more monks would start from the Gyangdrak Gompa to go to see the secret valley.

Norbu's father was happy to allow his son and Brother Tameng to be helped by Hariram Maharaj. His son would be better protected in this strange expedition. After the severe storm, most of the pilgrim groups had not arrived at Darchen, and it was a slow business day. The situation would probably continue for a week, and it was possible that this entire crazy expedition would be over, and everyone would return from the secret valley that they were talking about. He did not want to intervene in something that his son was obviously happy with. He was in good company and this was not some travel that would result in ill-mannered behaviour with the helper boys who came along with the pilgrim groups.

Hariram Maharaj requested permission to borrow a horse so that he could have help to carry his equipment and supplies. This was easily given by Norbu's mother. She allowed the strange cook from India to borrow her own horse, for she knew that he was very docile and would walk obediently behind anyone in these hills. Very soon, Brother Tameng, Norbu and Hariram Maharaj were away, walking from Darchen towards the inner *kora* areas and on to Gyangdrak Gompa with their two yaks, one horse and Norbu's mastiff. Brother Tameng was keen to meet up with his brother monks and was eager to find out about the information that they would have collected about the *beyuls* of the *Kang Renpoche* valleys and this sacred land.



## **Book 2: Chapter 9: Part 5: They discuss the *Beyul* at Gyangdrak Gompa**

Vijay Kulkarni had affirmed his interest in wanting to see the parchments, maps and sketches that were spoken about by the senior monk at Chiu Gompa. Loga of the Kila-Chu, as the senior monk was to be called, said, “As I told you, I have not got to see the ‘mouth of the Lion’, but I do know that those documents will be able to tell you more about the location or the possible location. Perhaps, the time has come. Perhaps, this is the reason why I was not able to go to the secret valley that my grandfather spoke about. Do you really want to see those documents? Why? Should they not remain a secret? Should the location of the source of the Indus not remain a secret?”

Vijay nodded in agreement, and replied, “You are correct that what is a secret is best served by being a secret. There are justified reasons as to why our ancients kept some matters to be hidden from the common view. This is one such reason. The sources of the rivers were always to be seen as a precious treasure. The rivers can be controlled in the valleys that give birth to it. Kings can rule their kingdoms wisely, or deny the water to other kingdoms. If allowed to be shared, it becomes a resource that can be restricted. In any which way, the source of the river is the fulcrum of a kingdom, its people and their king.”

The senior monk looked up at Vijay with new respect, and said, “You speak wisely, my friend. You speak very wisely indeed. This is the treasure of the Himalayas, the upper Himalayas in Tibet. The *Kang Renpoche* is at the centre and holds the secrets to the treasures of the world.

The greatest of the rivers, and many rivers there are, they emerge from the folds of the sacred mountain. Everyone, one and all, they think they know that such and such river starts its flow from such and such place. But, they do not. They do not know the exact source, or the exact valley. For, every river, at its source, has many streams that feed it. One does not know which stream or which valley is actually the cause of its birth.”

“But, my friend, the parchments, maps and sketches and paintings are not here at Chiu Gompa,” the senior monk said, “I had kept all those documents in a protected box and I have placed them in the custody of the senior monk at Gyangdrak Gompa. They have many more such documents. The Gompa is at the entrance to the inner *kora*. Have you been to the inner *kora*? The Gyangdrak Gompa is at the very edge, and one can see the *Kang Renpoche* in all its glory from that very place. We will go to the Gyangdrak Gompa. Come, I will go with you. We will drive down to Darchen by one of the jeeps and then borrow horses to go to the Gompa. We will reach early.”

Vijay was excited to be on the move again. A chance to go to the Gyangdrak Gompa? Who would refuse? To be at the edge of the inner *kora*? How could one stay away? To be a guest at the Gompa for a couple of days, if I was lucky, he thought. This was it. The senior monk, Loga of the Kla-Chu, managed to get a lift on one of the pilgrim vehicles. It was a truck, and Vijay sat along with him and two helper boys from Nepal who had been hired to work with the pilgrim groups. They served them with hot tea from a thermos flask that they had. Vijay was blissful at the taste of the sugary milk-laden tea that he

had, '*just like it was made in Pune*', he thought to himself.

At Darchen, the senior monk from the Chiu Gompa went about asking at the eateries for horses to be taken on hire to go to the Gyangdrak Gompa. There seemed to be a scarcity of horses, for most pilgrim groups would have taken them away on the *kora*. One of the yak-boys came up to them and explained that it would be best to ask the eatery run by the old couple from Shiquanhe, for they had many horses and yaks. Why, only today, the yak-boy explained, the monk from Choku Gompa and a funny looking Indian and the Shiquanhe boy had gone in haste towards Gyangdrak Gompa. The old couple from Shiquanhe would definitely be able to help, the yak-boy said.

At the eatery run by Norbu's parents, to their surprise, the senior monk of Chiu Gompa and Vijay explained that they needed two horses to ride up to Gyangdrak Gompa. Norbu's father expressed his curiosity and explained that there seemed to be quite a number of people going up to the Gyangdrak Gompa from the other monasteries. The Choku Gompa had sent two monks earlier, and now Brother Tameng had gone in with Norbu, his son, and Hariram Maharaj, a vegetarian cook from Gujarat in India. There was something happening in an exciting way, he suggested.

Norbu's parents described the events of the night at the Choku Gompa, of the twelve pilgrims who vanished, of the herd of giant wild yaks and the wild wolves and the expedition from Dirapuk to enter the hidden valley. As long as his son was safe, and more and more sensible men were involved in this matter, Norbu's father had no

hesitation in helping them out with horses and supplies. He assured them that he was certain that they would not be returning any day soon. He thought that they would be drawn into this adventure, and more and more, he was sure that they would be traveling for many days.

Vijay and Loga of the Kla-Chu thought about Norbu's father and his predictions as they rode up towards the Gyangdrak Gompa. This seemed to be getting exciting, and they were looking forward to being drawn into it. As Loga of the Kla-Chu, the senior monk of the Chiu Gompa told Vijay, "Brother, as I told you, there is always a time and there is always a reason about why events happen when they do, and the manner in which they occur. Today, we are both witness to this amazing turn of situations and happenings. Let us see where they lead us."

They arrived at the Gyangdrak Gompa, and noted the number of horses and yaks that were already gathered in an open shed. There were many visitors, Vijay thought. A junior monk had seen Loga of the Kla-Chu and knew him to be the senior monk at the Chiu Gompa. He rushed forward to welcome them and offered to take them to meet the venerable Nam Ang Tsering, for they were probably here for the meeting. In answer to an immediate query about the meeting, the junior monk replied that there were many monks and visitors from different lands who had been gathering here since yesterday and since that strange storm on the *Kang Renpoche*.

Master Ang Tsering was not surprised to know that there were more visitors to the Gyangdrak Gompa. He welcomed them and requested them to join the group of



other visitors. It was quite a team that had assembled here, and he was thankful to the sacred *Kang Renpoche* for making such a meeting possible, he said. There was Sardar Amarpal Singh, who wanted to walk inside the inner *kora*, and try to climb on the slopes, which was simply unthinkable. Along with him was Brother Sonam Sangye, the monk from the very sacred Nalanda. We are truly blessed, he said, smiling at Sangye. Escorting them both was the unexpected companion, Shenshe, the policeman from Shiquanhe. He was also welcome.

Brother Shedrub Repa of the Gyangdrak Gumpa introduced himself and introduced the two brother monks from the Choku Gumpa, who had arrived earlier, with the first news about the twelve pilgrims who had vanished below the slopes of the *Kang Renpoche*. Brother Tameng was introduced by Master Ang Tsering who in turn spoke about Hariram Maharaj and Norbu. Shenshe look curiously at Hariram Maharaj, but kept his peace. Vijay Kulkarni and the senior monk from the Chiu Gumpa, Loga of the Kla-Chu, introduced themselves.

Brother Tameng retold the turn of events, for it was he who knew of what had happened on the slopes of the Choku Gumpa. He described the rain and its intensity, of the strange group of twelve pilgrims who sat in the circle of stones. There was silence in the Gyangdrak Gumpa, as the group heard about the herd of giant wild yaks and there was awe as they listened to the description about the wolves that were silent. Norbu spoke of what he had heard in the night at Dirapuk, and they explained, in turns, about the hidden valley behind the monastery. Sardar Amarpal Singh spoke of his vision during the stormy night and Vijay Kulkarni explained that he had

had similar visions at the same time. Each one of them had been witnessing a part of the happening of that storm as they had gazed at the *Kang Renpoche*.

Master Ang Tsering spoke about the sanctity of the *Beyuls* and the aspect of divinity of the mountains and lakes in this region. There was magic in the place, he said, as he had said earlier, and it was not in our power to seek the mystery. Events would happen, and the mist would lift by itself, as it did in these mountains. The senior monk of the Chiu Gompa, Loga of the Kla-Chu, explained that he had once deposited a set of maps, sketches and paintings about the valleys to the north-west of the *Kang Renpoche*. The answers could well be in those documents. This was the reason for him to travel from Chiu Gompa to the Gyangdrak Gompa.

